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THE PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH ACTION.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

PROVINCIAL SYNOD

OF THE

ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF RUPERT'S LAND

IN ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL, WINNIPEG,

ON 8TH AUGUST, 1883.

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THE PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH ACTION.

PSALM CXXVII—1.—“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it ; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

We are engaged in building a great house. We are occupied in watching over the interests of a rapidly growing city. We meet as the Provincial Synod of Rupert's Land—the representative of the grand old historic Church of England in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. Pause, my brethren ; think for a moment what this assembly is, and what a sphere of action lies before it. It is the chief Synod of England's church in this country—that true portion of the Church catholic adhering faithfully to the oldest forms of government and worship, holding fast by the unchanging truths of the everlasting gospel, as embodied in creeds agreed upon by the undisputed general councils ; thus maintaining its union through the blessed memories of more than 1800 years with Christ's faithful followers of all ages and countries up to apostolic times. Such is the church that this Provincial Synod represents. And what shall I say of the sphere of action that God in His Providence has assigned to it ? My mind shrinks back appalled at the greatness of the work—the vastness of the responsibility. I flee for refuge to the words of my text. I hide myself under the shadow of God's Almighty power. We build, but God is the real builder. We are but instruments in His hands. We watch, but our eyes are often heavy with sleep. How blessed then the words, “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” The sphere of labor, how wonderful it is ! Manitoba, that but a few years ago, was a great untrodden waste,—its boundless prairies one vast sea of grass, that often, when summer heats had done their work, became a sea of fire, is already the home of a great population. Towns and cities have sprung up within its bounds with a rapidity that far outstrips anything yet experienced in the history of England's colonies. And these vast territories of Assiniboia, and Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and Athabasca ; what of them ! Do you doubt the certain splendor of their future ? Onward toward

the snow-peaked Rocky Mountains the tide of immigration is already flowing. More and more rapidly it will continue to flow until the territories of to-day will become populous and powerful provinces. The days of their isolation are over. Busy millions will soon find their homes in these regions, so wonderfully fertile and yet for so many ages only vast solitudes untrodden by the foot of civilized man. And of these millions how vast a number will have been trained in the doctrine and liturgy of England's National Church. On this Provincial Synod rests the main responsibility, under God, of devising measures for the spiritual welfare of these rapidly increasing multitudes as well as of the thousands of heathen Indians, who have yet to be brought into the fold of Christ's Church. If we attempt to deal with the question in Diocesan Synods throughout the country acting independently of each other, we shall only develop weakness instead of strength. The Provincial Synod is the heart of our church system; but the beatings of the heart must be strong and vigorous, if the whole body is to be duly nourished, and each separate member fitted for its work. I feel sure that if, as a church, we are to succeed in doing the work that God in his providence has marked out for us in this great country, we must seek to do it upon the old and well tried lines of the church's system. We must fall back upon the experience and wisdom of by-gone ages. We recognize Episcopacy as of divine appointment clearly set forth in the New Testament. The clergy and laity of each diocese should seek to act as one body under their Bishop as the divinely appointed head. The bishops in their turn, recognizing the authority of the Church, as set forth in her universal practice throughout the ages, should seek to unite themselves as one body under their Metropolitan or Archbishop. The various Diocesan Synods, duly represented in the Provincial Synod, should look to that Synod as their bond of union and chief authority in all that pertains to the general welfare of the church. This church system of ours, if faithfully carried out, will be our best safeguard against that failure which is always the sure result of want of unity. What a depth of meaning there is in our blessed Saviour's words in His intercessory prayer: "That they all may be one, as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee, that they may also be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." What does He mean by the connection of these two sentences? "That they also

may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Surely this: That unity in the church will be followed by success in her efforts to convince the world. Unity is here declared to be inseparable from the success of the great work committed to the church, namely, convincing the world that Jesus is the Christ. If there is no unity the progress of the Gospel will be checked. How can this be? Our text tells us that though *we* build, the success lies in God being the builder; though *we* watch, the averting of danger must depend on the sleepless vigilance of One "who neither slumbers nor sleeps." Here surely is the explanation. The church can only work successfully through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If her members have no mutual love—no spirit of charity—if each one is seeking his own and caring nothing for the brethren, then God the Holy Ghost can find no dwelling place in such hearts. The Lord and Giver of Life is driven away. How then can the work of the church prosper? It cannot prosper—it must of necessity fail.

My brethren, let this be a day of heart-searching with us all. We have met twice before in Provincial Synod, but the importance of this meeting is far in advance of that of either of the other two. Then we were looking forward to great changes that we felt sure were coming upon the country. To-day we are in the midst of these changes, and our most earnest prayers as well as wisest counsels and most vigorous efforts are needed to enable us to meet them. Let us be sure that God is with us before we gird ourselves for the battle. David was advised to try Saul's armor in contest with the Philistine. He tried it on, but wisely determined to lay it aside, and to trust himself in God's hands; and because God was with him and he went out to battle in God's appointed way, he slew the proud defier of Israel's host and came back laden with his spoils. Let us read the lesson to-day. Saul's armor—mere worldly wisdom, human ambition striving for pre-eminence,—must be laid aside; the sling and the stone, contemptible though they may appear in the eye of the world, must alone be used. We must go forward in God's strength, not in our own. We must have God's spirit with us, or our work will end in defeat, disaster, confusion; but remember, He will be with us only if we are one together and one in Christ.

"That they may all be one as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."

The same prominence that our blessed Saviour himself gives to unity in the church, we find insisted upon throughout the writings of the Holy Apostles. See what a contrast St. James draws between strife and unity in their results:

"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

What does St. Paul say: "Fulfil ye my joy, and ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." See how vast an importance he attributes to unity. His intensely earnest wishes for their welfare will all be fulfilled, if only they are of one mind.

St. Peter is not less emphatic in his testimony as to the need of unity: "Finally, be ye all of one mind; having compassion one of another; love as brethren; be pitiful, be courteous."

Surely, then, my brethren, we need to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, in praying for a spirit of unity. If we try to forward the work of His Church without it, we shall surely fail. We shall be resisting the Holy Spirit, we shall drive Him from our midst, and so dry up the fountains of spiritual life, both in the Church collectively and in ourselves as individuals. Can earnest effort and unremitting toil on the part of the husbandman make up for the want of the dews and showers and sunshine from on high? Will not his labor be utterly thrown away? The trees and plants and flowers will fade and wither and die in spite of his efforts. So it is with the spiritual husbandry. No worldly wisdom, no human energy, no mental power, will secure the progress of the Gospel if the presence of God the Holy Ghost is denied. There will be no times of refreshing for God's heritage; the channels of grace will be dry; the collective action of the church will be weakened, her right arm will be paralyzed, she will become shrunk and withered and ready to die.

Now, then, my brethren, while our period of probation still goes on, while as yet the startling words of an unchangeable doom—"Too late! too late!" have not sounded in our ears; now, in this our accepted time, in this the day of our merciful visitation, let us pray for grace that we may "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."

